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NEW PROPORTIONS IN POLITICAL INSTRUCTION

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We have before us the college course in government for undergraduates, the great majority of whom are going into business or the learned professions, and will have no other opportunity to get, through systematic study, the right attitude toward the State. Our problem is a severely practical one. We are seeking results in the form of good citizenship; and good citizenship is mainly a matter of the heart rather than of the head. It is far more a matter of impulse than of knowledge. Given a body of honest, patriotic, sober citizens and the rest will take care of itself. Switzerland is said to have self-government, yet few of its citizens have had a course in college which deals with government.

The direct question before us is, what changes shall be made in the course in order that it will be better adapted to the results we seek? I shall ask only for a slight change in emphasis. No doubt just the sort of course I shall propose is now given by many of us. If that is the case, bear with me patiently; for without doubt in many instances a very different sort of path is followed, a path which leads through dust and ashes, to discouragement or indifference. Our Association should lend all its great influence to providing such a course for every undergraduate as will make it more probable that self-government will survive among us—or should one say, will arise among us? What liberty we have is threatened, not by the hereditary despot, but by a force that is far worse; the mob led by the demagogue, ignorance led by greed. Our only champion against this foe of our institutions is a body of enlightened and patriotic leaders, followed by a body of citizens with a reasonably accurate view of what is possible of accomplishment through governmental interference or support.

Our material is a group of young persons about to take up the duties of citizens along with the duty of making a living, devoting about 99 per cent of their energies to the latter. They propose to devote to our work in college about three hours a week for a college year. We propose, as Mr. Bryce says, to sow the seeds of idealism, to plant the germs of *civisme* before the boy becomes too much occupied with business or pleas-

ure to receive them.¹ Our object is not to make political scientists, or expert administrators, or able statesmen. Our purpose is to get the boy's heart right; to give him the right impulse; to establish a disposition to be a good citizen. Without this impulse, he may know all the political science in all the books, and yet as a consequence be only a more expert demagogue. As Mr. Bryce goes on to say, we wish to give him such knowledge of his institutions as to make him interested in them and disposed to love them. We must make him feel the community about him; disposed to live under its laws; willing to support the officers of these laws.

With this material and this purpose; what changes should we make in the course? I wish to recommend three: (1) that we give much less attention to the federal government as compared with the state and local government; (2) that we give much more attention to the functions of the State as compared with its machinery; (3) that we brighten the work somewhat with some comparisons with the practice in foreign countries.

My first proposition is that we give to state and local government in our teaching far more emphasis than we do, four or five times as much emphasis. This is desirable not only because the State now does most of the things in which we are most vitally interested, but because the state and local governments should continue to do them. There is danger of these continuing to be badly attended to; and finally of being given over to the federal government which will not attend to them any better and local self-government will have become atrophied.

Mr. J. A. Tawney says,

If this tendency is not checked and the States continue to surrender the exercise of their reserved powers, or fail to exercise them in harmony with the interests of their sister States, then the federal government, as a *dernier ressort*, may be compelled to assume practical control over the States and the affairs of their people.²

One should not argue against the federal government having ample powers. There is no reason why powers should not overlap in many fields.

There is no reason why both State and nation should not legislate against adulterated foods or cloths, the nation limiting its activities to interstate commerce. As Mr. Root says, however,

¹ *Educational Review*, iv, 171.

² Reinsch, *Readings on American Federal Government*, p. 776.

There is but one way in which the States of the Union can maintain their power and authority under the conditions which are now before us, and that way is by an awakening on the part of the States to a realization of their own duties to the country at large.³

No one here will deny that it is important for local self-government to be preserved in this country.

The sphere of state legislation is so comprehensive, and yet so much a matter of commonplace interest and information, that it has been largely ignored by the teacher and text-book writer in favor of the more spectacular and sensational in federal affairs.

Mr. Bryce in his *American Commonwealth*⁴ has described this sphere as follows:

These rights practically cover nearly all the ordinary relations of citizens to one another and to their government, nearly all of the questions which have been most agitated in England and France of recent years. An American may, through a long life, never be reminded of the federal government, except when he votes at presidential and congressional elections, buys a package of tobacco bearing the government stamp, lodges a complaint against the post office, and opens his trunk for a custom-house officer on the pier at New York when he returns from a tour in Europe, etc.

Professor Beard⁵ seems to think this is too strong a statement of the importance of the state government to the individual. He thinks

The federal government is not so far away from the life of the citizens as it once was, and as the economic organization of labor and capital increases the extent and strength of its ramifications throughout the social body, the federal government will inevitably come nearer and nearer to the private citizen. . . . Nevertheless the functions of the State will also increase in importance, and the State as a guardian of the fundamental and private interests should grow in the esteem of the citizen.

President Wilson has said

All the civil and religious rights of our citizens depend upon state legislation: the education of the people is in the care of the States; with them rests the regulation of the suffrage; they prescribe the rules of marriage, and the legal relations of husband and wife, of parent and child; they determine the powers of masters over servants and the whole

³ Reinsch, *Readings on American Federal Government*, p. 735.

⁴ 1912, vol. i, pp. 425-426.

⁵ *American Government and Politics*, pp. 442-443.

law of principal and agent, which is so vital a matter in all business transactions; they regulate partnership, debt and credit, and insurance; they constitute all corporations, both private and municipal, except such as specially fulfil the financial or other special functions of the federal government; they control the possession, distribution, and use of property, the exercise of trades, and all contract relations; and they formulate and administer all criminal law, except only that which concerns crimes committed against the United States, on the high seas, or against the law of nations. Space would fail in which to enumerate the particular items of this vast range of powers; to detail its parts would be to catalogue all social and business relationships, to set forth all the foundations of law and order.⁶

And (in sec. 1095) he shows that of the dozen political issues of England in the last hundred years, all but two would here be matters of state legislation; and one of these, slavery, was given to the Federal Government only by recent constitutional amendment under stress of the excitement of war.

Professor Reinsch says,

All indiscriminate decrying of state government is harmful because it is likely to disgust the citizen with the organization of state government and send him to the central, federal government for help. The legislation of the State is actually of far greater importance to the citizen than that originated in congress. The general law under which we live is entirely under the control of the state legislatures. Such momentous matters as the relation between labor and its employers, the law of the family and of property in all its ramifications, the law of personal injuries and of crimes, are all within the state legislative field. Moreover, the last decade has brought a remarkable development in the administrative functions of our commonwealths, far beyond anything that could have been foreseen during the earlier era of our history.

Yet unhappily it is true that state legislatures have attracted public attention and caused public discussion not so much on account of the importance of their functions, or the greatness of the interests with which they deal, as on account of the bottomless corruption which has disgraced so many of them. Their evil fame has almost outweighed in the public mind the general usefulness of these institutions throughout the country. It is indeed time that a different attitude should be assumed toward these bodies, and that more intelligent and discriminating attention should be given to the efforts of their members. It has almost become fashionable to talk of state legislatures as bodies in which men of ability and respectable character are in a disappearing minority, and yet even the most superficial acquaintance with actual legislatures

⁶ The State, sec. 1094.

will immediately reveal the fact that they are fairly representative of the American people, and that there is in them a great deal of honest effort to grapple with the difficult problems of legislation, misguided though this effort may be at times for lack of authentic information, and thwarted by certain vicious arrangements in our political system.⁷

It is nothing new for one to ask that much more attention be given to state and local government. The proposition has been frequently repeated during the last decade. In 1903 Mr. J. B. Davis said of the course in Detroit Central High School covering local, state and national government,

Nearly one-half of the time is given to local institutions and about one-quarter of the entire course to municipal government. The reason for this is that we believe we are preparing the young not to be governors or presidents, but to be citizens.⁸

It cannot be maintained that we are giving to state government anything like the attention in our teaching that its relative importance to the citizen justifies. But let us avoid the possibility of seeming to set up a straw man to tilt at. The following figures were collected from a number of school and college textbooks, all in fairly general use:

B. A. Hinsdale's book, reprinted in 1912, and therefore still sold and used, gives to the federal government 251 pages and to the State only 53; to congress he gives 91 pages and to the state legislature 5; to the federal executive 43 and to the state 3; to local government 11 pages in all. This book of course represents the oldest school.

Mr. Bryce in the *American Commonwealth* gives to the federal government 396 pages; and to state, local and municipal government 256; to congress 120, and the state legislature 17: national executive 59, and state 7. But he says:

I call it [state government] a field: it is rather a primeval forest, where the vegetation is rank, and through which scarcely a trail has been cut . . . in the meantime, the difficulties I have stated [lack of pathfinding investigation] must be my excuse for treating this branch of my subject with a brevity out of all proportion to its real importance.⁹

S. E. Forman, 1910, gives congress 15 pages and the state legislature 8; federal executive 15, state 7; federal judiciary 15, and state 7.

⁷ *American Legislatures and Legislative Methods*, pp. 127-129.

⁸ Conference for Good City Government, Proceedings, p. 233.

⁹ Pp. 412-413.

James and Sanford, 1901, give to local government (town, county, city and state) 110 pages, federal 246; to state government 17 pages; federal executive alone 55; organization of congress alone 43; town and county government 7 pages.

J. W. Garner's interesting little book *Government in the United States* treats state legislation in 18 pages, congress in 43; state executive in 18, federal in 79; state judiciary in 16, federal in 16: municipal, county, town, 52.

R. L. Ashley, 1910, gives to the national government 184 pages, state 130; national legislature 25, state 9; national executive 25, state 6; town, county, city, 25.

Even as good and progressive a book as W. B. Guitteau's for high schools, gives to the elements of politics, origin, structure and functions of rural local government, and municipal government, both organization and activities, only 73 pages out of 470. To state legislation only 11 as against 37 to federal legislation, and to federal, executive and administrative departments well into twice as much as to state.

C. A. Beard, 1910, whose book is best proportioned, gives to the federal government 327 pages, state 347; congress 63, its organization 22, its powers 14, and procedure 27 in separate chapters; state legislation 31, in one chapter; federal executive 65, election of President 21, his powers 28; administration 16, besides many chapters on department work; state executive 28 in one chapter.

P. S. Reinsch, in his two books of *Readings*, gives to the federal government 845 pages and to state 464, both being recent books.

The college board's examinations are indicative of and influence the school courses. Out of 31 questions, given in 1901-1913, at least 25 are on the federal government and yet there is no valid objection to properly framed questions on state or municipal government.

The *New England Syllabus* of 1910 gives to local government 24 pages; municipal 36; state 40; federal 40.

Is it not safe to say we have been giving twice as much time to our federal government as to the remainder of our organization? If so, is that proportion justified? The *New England Syllabus*, speaking for the high school, but applicable also to the college, says:

Not only should the study of our federal government come last in the high school civics course, but the time devoted to this part of the subject should not be more than about one-fourth of the time allotted to the whole. Commercial reasons, no doubt, have brought the undue space and emphasis given in the majority of civics text-books to the

treatment of the federal government. Most of our text-books are made to sell in all the States of the Union. Since state governments vary so widely that comparatively few statements—and these but general commonplaces—can be made regarding them, no adequate or concrete treatment of state government could be given in these books.

Since local governments in the different parts of the Union vary still more widely than state governments, local government has received still less adequate and satisfactory treatment than state government has. Hence text-book makers and publishers have relied largely upon a treatment of the federal government to make text-books which should be salable in all States. Such books give to the young citizen a false perspective of the field of government and a distorted view of his relation to it.¹⁰

My first point has been easy of elucidation, my second is, that we should give to the functions of government more attention than we have given. This change is ancillary to the first. State government cannot be properly provided for in school and college text-books unless we transfer the emphasis to functions. But if we are disposed to follow the recommendation and if it can be followed, one of the greatest bugbears to teaching state and local government will disappear. We are told not to teach New York government in college because many of the students are not from New York, and they would like to know about a government under which they are to live. Now then if we turn from the machinery of government—the tools government uses; to the functions of government, to the things the citizen expects the government to do; these latter are about the same all over this country and all over the world. All governments have to solve the same elementary problems. The study of the machinery is merely the observation of the great political experimental station called the world, and an attempt to generalize on these observations as to what is the best solution of these problems.

But I would not be misunderstood. I do not argue for a course in theories, or abstract science, or anything of the sort. No teacher of government should listen to a single opinion from any pupil as to what is good or bad about government without knowing that the pupil has a fact behind that opinion. It may not be necessary to ask for it every time if the teacher knows the pupil; but it should be asked for whenever there is any doubt about its existence. If a student says he believes in the initiative; ask him what variety of it; when he names the variety ask him what reasons he has for believing in it. Where has he known of

¹⁰ Pp. 18-19.

laws being initiated in this way successfully? If he says Switzerland, ask him if he is sure about his facts, and give a contradictory one if possible. Make him see that mere opinion about government is nearly worthless, and often leads to demagoguery and other abuses. Don't discourage him, but lead him gently to see that there are but few useful facts about government; that we have reached but few useful conclusions. All the rest is hope and experiment. But all these great problems face us and must be solved and he must help to solve them.

I do not expect every good teacher to agree with my third suggestion; namely, that some comparative government be attempted in the undergraduate course. The *New England Syllabus*, p. 25, quotes John Fiske as saying, "It is impossible thoroughly to grasp the meaning of any group of facts, until you have duly compared them with allied groups of facts." When we come to the study of constitutions, for example, what the average citizen needs to have is a conception of the function of a constitution. What are our written constitutions for, anyway? England is a well governed state, and places no such check upon her organs of government. It is true that the lords have long acted as a restraining force in England, but now that the lords are disappearing, what is going to replace them? A one-chambered legislature without check of any sort? If so, why may we not have the same? To understand this problem it is not necessary to memorize any large parts of the state constitutions; but it is necessary for the student to read several of them through carefully to see what kind of things they are. Every student of the formation of constitutions should read one of the old-fashioned short kind and one of the new-fangled long kind. He should also read a translation of the French constitution and the Prussian, if he can not read them in the original. Now this does not make up much reading in the aggregate. Then he and the teacher should discuss their differences in the class. It is a reasoning process and an attitude of mind that the student must develop. By this I do not mean an ability to talk without facts.

If we come to a comparative study of the enactment of statutes, we are faced at once by the problem of initiation. Shall it be by interested parties in the "initiative" method; or by any old party that happens to go to the legislature, as is the practice in our States at present; or by some responsible and conspicuous person like a governor or a prime minister? Is it not possible to get the average college student to take in this proposition and read enough of modern English and French history to grasp it in some of its outlines? A student should be willing to read

one hundred and fifty or two hundred pages a week in such a course. If he do so, he can find ample material within that limit. As the *New England Syllabus* says (p. xxv) our object is to "stimulate intelligent criticism to the end that as generation after generation grow up and have their influence upon government, the unnecessary, the weak, and the bad in government may be eliminated." So, after generations of effort, have we been able in New York to eliminate the party column ballot in favor of the Massachusetts form. It took generations, but it has finally come. Government is not a static thing, it is a movement. One must study it as he studies a stream or a glacier. It is constantly changing. We cannot memorize stakes, we must grasp processes.

I have discussed these three suggestions as if we could depend upon having persons to teach government who know the subject and are interested in it. Unfortunately we know that such is not the case. Many of us would dispense with classes in government altogether until we can get such persons. Time spent with a good teacher of mathematics or Latin or physics is far more likely to promote good citizenship than time spent with a poor teacher of government. The person who pretends to try to teach others to be what he is not is a mere hypocrite with all the weakness and impotence that hypocrisy carries with it. The teacher of government must first know more about political problems than the other persons in his neighborhood; then we must have enough interest to use that knowledge with some effect in helping to lead his neighborhood in the right direction. The City Club of New York never participates in any election. It never has any part in the appointment of or election of any person to office. But it exerts a constant influence in favor of every useful political reform. It arouses no antagonisms because its efforts are not to compel but to enlighten. The teacher of government might properly follow this example. He should be recognized as a wise guide in matters of government, just as the teacher of medicine would be in cases of illness, or the teacher of law in questions of property rights.

This country must lead in the development of a democratic government, in which the majority will rule with wisdom. This can come only with trained leaders. The colleges must train the leaders. Are we doing it? Have we any very definite plans on foot by which we mean to do it?